

Art@IIT Spring Art exhibits

By [Udayan Das](#)



If you were not on campus between 4:30 and 7 pm this last Thursday then you missed out on Art@IIT's biggest event yet. Four Art exhibits kicked off simultaneously: for three of the four exhibits the Artist was present in person and a reception was held from 4:30 – 7:00; the fourth exhibit was a display of student photographs from the MTCC Anniversary Photos competition.

Exhibit 1: *Emergence* – Dr. Audrius Plioplys at the Kemper Room Gallery

The *Emergence* series brings together 18 pieces from Dr. Plioplys's post-retirement work and brings together a number of themes. Dr. Plioplys, who is a noted neurologist and neuroscientist spoke about the driving forces behind the *Emergence* series at the reception at the Galvin Library. First, it deals with the idea of his own personal emergence from chronic illness (which is what forced him into retirement). Artistically, it is based on two previous series by the artist: *Neurotheology* and *Thoughts from Under a Rock*. Each of the pieces is based on existing artwork by the artist and is thus, in some way or another a re-invention of the existing work. The method used to create the artwork was to begin with the base layer in Adobe Photoshop of the existing artwork and then building layer upon layer of other images on top of that. Dr. Plioplys incorporated a number of his own MRI brain scan images and EEG tracings (which are both images after all) as several layers in the artwork. This is done in a subtle way so as not to be obvious to the observer but there nevertheless for the viewing. Each piece therefore consists of more than 30 layers in total, with the top layer being a map of neural pathways. All this is meant to signify different aspects of the creative process. Says Dr. Plioplys:

"The neuronal arborizations reveal underlying artistic processes, artistic memories, and creative thoughts. From neuronal complexity, thoughts, words, and philosophy emerge."

He went on to speak about emergent processes in the human brain, with consciousness and the whole process of thinking thoughts themselves being emergent processes. It is possible to describe the complexity of the brain, i.e. its structure consisting of neurons and neuronal pathways, and its physiological behavior as exhibited by the EEG. But it is impossible from going to that quantitative understanding to a qualitative understanding of how the brain functions, i.e. where does consciousness emerge from. He described this as being a classic *hard* problem and cited gravity as another example of the same: it is possible to describe through equations how gravity behaves, or what effects it causes, but not to explain *how* it does this. Life, similarly, is an emergent property.

He elaborated on these topics more during the question and answer session. When asked whether consciousness exists in animals, he responded with the fact that any brain that has neurons has consciousness as an emergent phenomenon. He described an interesting experiment with mice that demonstrated their ability to empathize: when a mice had been kept in contact with another for some time, hurting one of them would cause the other to react; whereas when a non-familiar mouse was hurt, the reaction was one of indifference.

Offline, he spoke at length about two pieces that clearly showed what the background image was. *Aspirations / Contemplation* is a shot taken from behind the *Sphinx* in Egypt and is meant to show what the *Sphinx* sees, which now is the bustling township of Cairo: how the times have changed, perhaps is what the *Sphinx* is contemplating (the EEG and brain scan imagery are visible on close observation at the bottom right of this one). *Self-deception / Supplication* is a rare piece with a black and white underlying image.

The exhibit will remain at the Kemper Gallery through May 15th 2009, so those who missed the opening should definitely check it out.



Dr. Audrius Plioplys: Emergence

art @ IIT



ILLINOIS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

Dr. Audrius Plioplys: Emergence

Dr. Audrius Plioplys, who is of Lithuanian descent, was born and raised in Canada, and has spent the better part of his life creating art while in his practice as a neuro-researcher. His artwork is an ongoing metaphorical investigation of consciousness, thinking, and the thought process.

As a child neurologist, neurobiology researcher, and accomplished artist, Plioplys has attempted to incorporate all aspects of his professional career through his artwork. In doing so he has transformed the neurobiology research laboratory into an artist's studio.

Plioplys retired recently to pursue his artwork. Emergence, his first post-retirement body of work, is on display for the first time at IIT.

Further information about the artist and his work can be found at www.plioplys.com.

www.art.iit.edu • 312.567.5293

Cover image: Dreams/Explorations © Audrius Plioplys 2008

Kemper Gallery

Paul V. Galvin Library

Illinois Institute of Technology

35 West 33rd Street, Chicago, IL 60616

March 5—May 15, 2009

Opening reception:

Thursday, March 5 • 4:30–7 p.m.

Lecture by Dr. Audrius Plioplys • 5:30 p.m.

Exhibition hours:

Monday–Friday: 9 a.m.–6 p.m.

Saturday: 9 a.m.–5 p.m.

Sunday: noon–5 p.m.

For additional information about art@iit, Audrius Plioplys, travel, and parking directions, see www.art.iit.edu.

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